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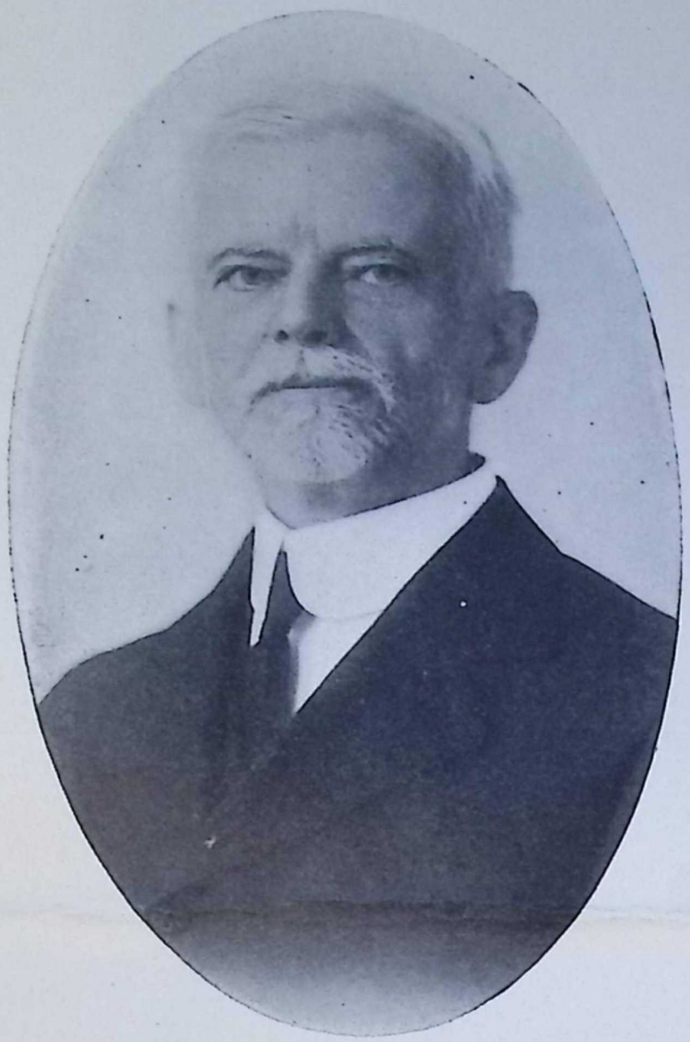

Geo. L. Petrie D.D.

Born in Cheraw, S. C., February 25, 1840; Attended Classical School in Charleston, S. C.; Matriculate of Georgia Military Institute, 1855; Matriculate of Davidson College, 1856; Graduate of Oglethorpe University, 1859; Attended as Visitor, The First Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., Augusta, Georgia, 1861; Graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary, 1862; Chaplain Confederate Army, 1863-1865; Teacher and Professor of Latin, Oakland College, 1866-1869; Pastor Presbyterian Church, Greenville, Ala., 1870-1872; Pastor in Petersburg, Va., 1872-1878; Pastor in Charlottesville, Va., 1878-1928; Emeritus Pastor in Charlottesville, Va., 1928-; A. M. Oglethorpe University, 1862; D.D. Hampden-Sydney College, 1887; LL.D. Oglethorpe University, 1923; Author of several books and miscellaneous writings.

SOUVENIR

PRESENTED IN COMPLIMENT TO

GEORGE LAURENS PETRIE

The sole surviving attendant of that historic assembly which gave birth to The Presbyterian Church in the United States, at Augusta, Georgia, in the year 1861

BY

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PUBLICATION

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

SEVENTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

IN SESSION AT

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

May, 1930

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THE original message to the churches, written by Rev. James H. Thornwell, D.D., LL.D., is one of the most precious heritages of our Church. The original manuscript was preserved by the stated clerks of the General Assembly, and finally came into the hands of the late Rev. Thos. H. Law, D.D., LL.D., who served the Church with conspicuous ability as permanent clerk from 1900 to 1910 and as stated clerk from 1910 to 1922. The manuscript was found in April, 1930, among some personal and official papers of Dr. Law, which had been carefully preserved by members of his family. Photostatic copies of the first and last pages and of the signatures were made for use in the souvenir pamphlet. Quotations are also printed from the body of the message which set forth the principles upon which our Church was founded. It is a pleasure to present the paper in connection with a brief statement from Rev. George Laurens Petrie, D.D., the sole survivor of the historic Assembly which called our Church into being.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PUBLICATION

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R. E. MAGILL, Executive Secretary

°

Richmond, Virginia, May, 1930.

· REMINISCENCES ·

Of the First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States ✠ Meeting in Augusta, Georgia on December fourth, Eighteen-sixty-one. ✠ ✠

BY

GEORGE LAURENS PETRIE, D.D., LL.D.

PASTOR EMERITUS, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

✠

Past = Future

I HAD the very great privilege of witnessing the organization of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1861, in Augusta, Georgia. Also, I greatly enjoyed listening to the able discussions of the various questions involved in such a movement. It all came about in this way. I was at that time a student in Columbia Theological Seminary, in the Senior Class. I had been studying Presbyterianism in theory. Here was an opportunity of studying Presbyterianism in action. I expressed to the Seminary Faculty my desire to witness the event. Leave of absence was granted me. I went.

It was a wonderful occasion to me. On my arrival in Augusta, a kind Providence brought me in contact with Mr. Shear, a well known and hospitable elder of the Augusta Church. He took me to his home and made me his guest during my stay in Augusta. At his table, among numerous other guests, I sat beside Allen Wright, the chief of the Choctaw Indian Tribe. He was a refined and well educated Christian gentleman. Dr. B. M. Palmer was elected Moderator, one of the greatest Gospel Preachers and most eloquent pulpit orators, and at the same time adorned with the grace of a beautiful humility.

When the Assembly adjourned I felt I had been in the presence of giants, and I received from them a tremendous stimulus which has lingered with me through all these subsequent years. I feel it yet. I have often reverted to the experience, always with thanks for the privilege.

But the attitude of the Church and the Christian is not the backward look.

The future calls us and we wish to make a suitable response to its demands. The future interests us more than the past. From the past we are receding; into the future we are rushing. Let us be ready to do our part and to do it well, and in the manner best suited to today. So shall we sing as did our fathers:

"All hail the power of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall,
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all."

G. L. Pettie D. D.

Extracts from the
Address by The General Assembly

TO ALL THE CHURCHES OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE EARTH,
UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED AT THEIR SESSIONS IN
AUGUSTA, GEORGIA, DECEMBER, 1861

✠

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the earth, greeting: Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied upon you!

Dearly Beloved Brethren:

It is probably known to you that the Presbyteries and Synods in the Confederate States, which were formerly in connection with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, have renounced the jurisdiction of that body; and dissolved the ties which bound them ecclesiastically with their brethren of the North. This act of separation left them without any formal union among themselves. But as they were one in faith and order, and still adhered to their old standards, measures were promptly adopted for giving experssion to their unity, by the organization of a Supreme Court, upon the model of the one whose authority they had just relinquished. Commissioners, duly appointed, from all the Presbyteries of these Confederate States, met accordingly, in the city of Augusta, on the fourth day of December, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, and then and there proceeded to constitute the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States—that is to say, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship—were unanimously and solemnly declared to be the Constitution of the Church in the Confederate States, with no other change than the substitution of Confederate for United wherever the country is mentioned in the standards. The Church, therefore, in these seceded States, presents now the spectacle of a separate, and independent and complete organization, under the style and title of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. In thus taking its place among sister Churches of this and other countries, it seems proper that it should set forth the causes which have impelled it to separate from the Church of the North, and to indicate a general view of the course which it feels it incumbent upon it to pursue in the new circumstances in which it is placed.

We should be sorry to be regarded by our brethren in any part of the world as guilty of schism. We are not conscious of any purpose to rend the body of Christ. On the contrary, our aim has been to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. If we know our own hearts, and can form any just estimate of the motives which have governed us, we have been prompted by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God, and the efficiency, energy, harmony and zeal of His visible kingdom in the earth. We have separated from our brethren of the North as Abraham separated from Lot—because we are persuaded that the interests of true religion will be more effectually subserved by two independent Churches, under the circumstances in which the two countries are placed, than by one united body:

1. In the first place, the course of the last Assembly, at Philadelphia, conclusively shows that if we should remain together, the political questions which divide us as citizens, will be obtruded on our Church Courts, and discussed by Christian Ministers and Elders with all the acrimony, bitterness and rancour with which such questions are usually discussed by men of the world. Our Assembly would present a mournful spectacle of strife and debate.

* * * * *

The only conceivable condition, therefore, upon which the Church of the North and the South could remain together as one body, with any prospect of success is the rigorous exclusion of the questions and passions of the forum from its halls of debate. This is what always ought to be done. The provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other. The State is a natural institute, founded in the constitution of men as moral and social, and designed to realize the idea of justice. It is the society of rights. The Church is a supernatural institute founded in the facts of redemption, and is designed to realize the idea of grace. It is the society of the redeemed. The State aims at social order, the Church at spiritual holiness. The State looks to the visible and outward, the Church is concerned for the invisible and inward. The badge of the State's authority is the sword, by which it becomes a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well. The badge of the Church's authority is the keys, by which it opens and shuts the Kingdom of Heaven, according as men are believing or impenitent. The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual, that of the State includes the exercise of force. The Constitution of the Church is a Divine revelation—the Constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of Providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world, as the collision of different spheres in the world of matter. It is true that there is a point at which their respective jurisdictions seem to meet—in the idea

of duty. But even duty is viewed by each in very different lights. The Church enjoins it as obedience to God, and the State enforces it as the safeguard of order. But there can be no collision, unless one or the other blunders as to the things that are materially right. When the State makes wicked laws, contradicting the eternal principles of rectitude, the Church is at liberty to testify against them; and humbly to petition that they may be repealed. In like manner, if the Church becomes seditious and a disturber of the peace, the State has a right to abate the nuisance. In ordinary cases, however, there is not likely to be a collision. Among a Christian people, there is little difference of opinion as to the radical distinctions of right and wrong. The only serious danger is where moral duty is conditioned upon a political question. Under the pretext of inculcating duty, the Church may usurp the power to determine the question which conditions it, and that is precisely what she is debarred from doing. The condition must be given. She must accept it from the State, and then her own course is clear. If Caesar is your master, then pay tribute to him; but whether the if holds, whether Caesar is your master or not, whether he ever had any just authority, whether he now retains it, or has forfeited it, these are points which the Church has no commission to adjudicate.

* * * * *

2. Though the immediate occasion of separation was the course of the General Assembly at Philadelphia in relation to the Federal Government and the war, yet there is another ground on which the independent organization of the Southern Church can be amply and scripturally maintained. The unity of the Church does not require a formal bond of union among all the congregations of believers throughout the earth. It does not demand a vast imperial monarchy like that of Rome, nor a strictly universal council, like that to which the complete development of Presbyterianism would naturally give rise. The Church Catholic is one in Christ, but it is not necessarily one visible, all-absorbing organization upon earth. There is no schism where there is no breach of charity. Churches may be perfectly at one in every principle of faith and order, and yet geographically distinct, and mutually independent. As the unity of the human race is not disturbed by its division into countries and nations, so the unity of the spiritual seed of Christ is neither broken nor impaired by separation and division into various Church constitutions. Accordingly, in the Protestant countries, Church organizations have followed national lines. The Calvinistic Churches of Switzerland are distinct from the Reformed Church of France. The Presbyterians of Ireland belong to a different Church from the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the Presbyterians of this country constitute a Church, in like manner, distinct from all other Churches on the globe. That the division into national Churches, that is, Churches bounded by national lines, is, in the present condition of human nature, a benefit, seems to us too obvious for proof. It realizes to the Church Catholic all the advantages of a division of labor. It makes a Church organization homogeneous and compact—it stimu-

lates holy rivalry and zeal—it removes all grounds of suspicions and jealousy on the part of the state. What it lost in expansion is gained in energy. The Church Catholic, as thus divided, and yet spiritually one, divided, but not rent, is a beautiful illustration of the great philosophical principle which pervades all nature—the co-existence of the one with the many.

* * * * *

The ends which we propose to accomplish as a Church are the same as those which are proposed by every other Church. To proclaim God's truth as a witness to the nations; to gather his elect from the four corners of the earth, and through the Word, Ministries, and Ordinances to train them for eternal life, is the great business of His people. The only thing that will be at all peculiar to us, is the manner in which we shall attempt to discharge our duty. In almost every department of labor, except the pastoral care of congregations, it has been usual for the Church to resort to societies more or less closely connected with itself, and yet, logically and really distinct. It is our purpose to rely upon the regular organs of our government, and executive agencies directly and immediately responsible to them. We wish to make the Church, not merely a superintendent, but an agent. We wish to develop the idea that the congregation of believers, as visibly organized, is the very society or corporation which is divinely called to do the work of the Lord. We shall, therefore, endeavor to do what has never yet been adequately done—bring out the energies of our Presbyterian system of government. From the Session to the Assembly we shall strive to enlist all our courts, as courts, in every department of Christian effort. We are not ashamed to confess that we are intensely Presbyterian. We embrace all other denominations in the arms of Christian fellowship and love, but our own scheme of government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown in the Mount, and, by God's grace, we propose to put its efficiency to the test.

Brethren, we have done. We have told you who we are, and what we are. We greet you in the ties of Christian brotherhood. We desire to cultivate peace and charity with all our fellow Christians throughout the world. We invite to ecclesiastical communion all who maintain our principles of faith and order. And now we commend you to God and the Word of His grace. We devoutly pray that the whole Catholic Church may be afresh baptized with the Holy Ghost, and that she may speedily be stirred up to give the Lord no rest until He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

(Signed) B. M. Palmer, *Moderator;*
Jno. N. Waddel, *Stated Clerk;*
Joseph R. Wilson, *Permanent Clerk;*
D. McNeill Turner, *Temporary Clerk.*

Also signed by forty-six ministers and thirty-three Ruling Elders.

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Facsimile of First Page of Message to the Churches

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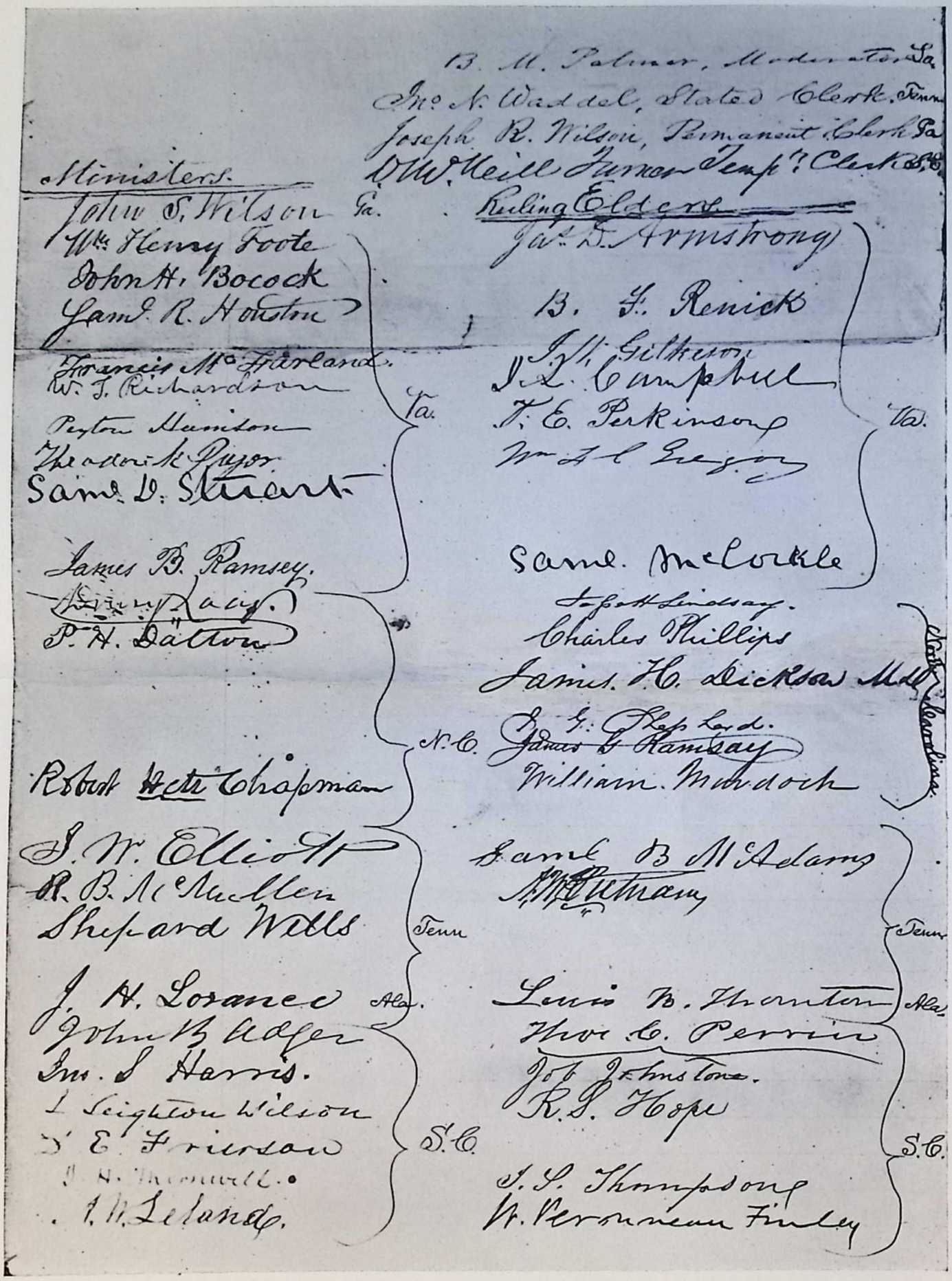
B. M. Palmer, Moderator Ga.
Jno. N. Waddel, Stated Clerk. Tenn.
Joseph R. Wilson, Permanent Clerk Ga.
D. W. Neill Furman Temp. Clerk S.C.

Facsimile of Last Page of Message to the Churches



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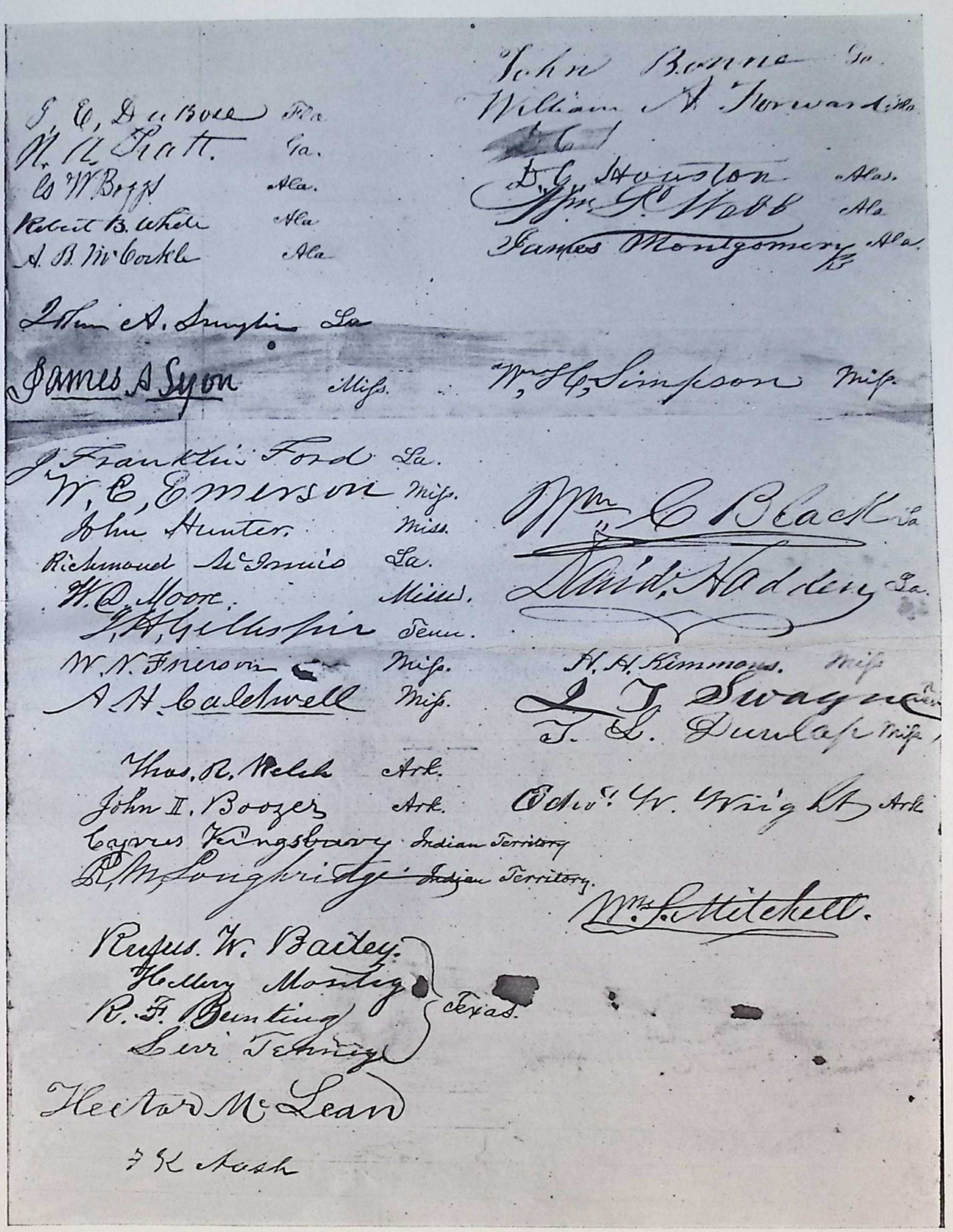

Facsimile of Signatures on Message to the Churches

A Solemn Hour in The Assembly of 1861

FROM THE "LIFE OF THORNWELL,"
BY REV. B. M. PALMER, D.D., LL.D.

"Dr. Thornwell was, of course, one of its guiding spirits; and the papers which gave the largest character of this assembly emanated from his pen, and were marked with the ability of his very best productions. We may be allowed to instance 'The Address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the Earth,' containing the clearest statement of the principles which had brought about the separation from the northern church; involving, as this did, a beautiful exposition of the nature and functions of the Church of God. It will stand as one of those documents to which the church will ever appeal, as a testimony for the truth, in times of darkness and trial, when the witnesses for it were thought worthy only of being slain. It was not only expressed with that precision of thought and language which was characteristic of the illustrious author, but it was pervaded with a sacramental fervour, which stamped upon it the impression of a sacred and binding covenant. The scene which was enacted at the moment of its subscription will be forgotten by none who witnessed it. Read, and read again, amid the solemn stillness of an audience whose emotions are hushed with awe, it was finally adopted and laid upon the moderator's table; when, one by one, the members came silently forward and signed the instrument with their names. We were carried back to those stirring times in Scottish story, when the solemn league and covenant was spread upon the grave stone in the Grey Friar's churchyard, and Christian heroes pricked their veins, that with the red blood they might sign their allegiance to the kingdom and crown of Jesus Christ, their Lord and head."